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AUTHOR	Abdi, Ali A.
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ABSTRACT

The case of Africa, in terms of development and democratic prospects, encounters a number of stubborn hurdles, and are increasingly more difficult to overcome. This paper, while agreeing with a number of leading Africanists, who are calling for the efficient repair of Africa's political systems, without which other components of the national and continental enterprises may not function effectively, calls for the establishment of citizenship education programs that must strengthen Africa's partially fledgling, but in many cases faltering new democracies. The paper cautions about accepting liberal democracy at face value and sees the possibility of selectively Africanizing democracy so that it fits the needs, as well as the expectations, of the African public. It opines that the problems of democratization and development would not be overcome without the African public acquiring at least a basic understanding of the positive contributions that open and democratic systems could make to their socio-economic advancements. The paper also recognizes that even if democracy may not always effectively respond to the needs of the people, its critical appreciation, via viable programs of citizenship, will, in the long run, produce better results for Africa's marginalized hundreds of millions of people. (Contains 55 references.) (Author/BT)

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Issues of Development, Democratic Prospects, and Citizenship Education: Theoretical perspectives on Sub-Saharan Africa

Ali A. Abdi
University of Alberta
Department of Educational Policy Studies/Faculty of Education
7-104 Education North
Edmonton, Canada T6G 2G5

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Abstract

The case of Africa, in terms of development and democratic prospects, is encountering a number of hurdles that are stubborn, and are even getting increasingly more difficult to overcome. This paper, while agreeing with a number of leading Africanists who are calling for the efficient repair of Africa's political systems without which, I concur, other components of the national and continental enterprises may not function effectively, calls for the establishment of citizenship education programmes that must strengthen Africa's partially fledging but, in many cases, faltering new democracies. The paper cautions about accepting liberal democracy at face value and sees the possibility of selectively Africanising democracy so it fits the needs as well as the expectations of the African public. The paper also recognizes that even if democracy may not always effectively respond to the needs of the people, its critical appreciation, via viable programs of citizenship, will, in the long run, produce better results for Africa's marginalised hundreds of millions.

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Introduction

It is possible, indeed pragmatic, to argue that Sub-Saharan Africa economic stagnation, institutional ineptness and, in most cases, quasi-permanent underdevelopment may be selectively traceable to a cluster of civil and governance problems that are essentially political (Gyimah-Boadi, 1998; Ihonvbere, 1996; Burnell, 1995). This paper will discuss a number of converging points on the problems of African development as well as processes and possibilities for viable democratization through citizenship education that aims for, and could achieve the emergence of critically informed citizens. These citizens, if Africa is to reverse the trends of global de-linking that it is currently exposed to, would proactively practice political participation as a multidimensional construct and practice that goes beyond the simple act of voting, and involves citizens fully partaking in defining and acting within and through their country's political processes, objectives and results. As an introductory work on these topics, this paper's analyses essentially represent preliminary theoretical discussions that are discursively brought together to highlight the importance of political development in all the actualities of the African continent. But political development is not an automatic historical event, and could only be achieved if and when it permeates public space and discourse. As such, the paper calls for the undertaking of citizenship education programs that literally teach people the values as well as the importance of political accountability and democracy.

As a preliminary point, it would be important to realize that pre-colonial traditional systems of learning in Africa were formulated with a tangible element of citizenship education that, among other things, explicated the different roles people had to play to effectively, if at times arbitrarily, manage the economic, political and general environmental resources in place (see Nyerere, 1968; Rodney, 1982; Abdi, 1998). With the arrival of colonialism, though, as Nyerere (1968) and Rodney (1982) pointed out, indigenous programs of education and development were either distorted or destroyed to pave the way for colonial education which, among other objectives, was an essential

item in Europe's onslaught on the African body and mind (Kallaway, 1984). During colonialism, programs of citizenship education were non-existent, for colonialism did not want to develop critical African citizens. In the postcolonial era, the ruling African elite did not engage in the development of viable and expansively constructive political education except in some select and limited civics instruction cases that were primarily designed to assure the loyalty of the public to military rulers and civilian dictators whose Cold War tactics and theatricals sustained their pre-1990s regimes. It was with the collapse of the Eastern Bloc (1989-1990) and the practical ushering of the uni-polar world that African "strong men" ran out of "new cards" to play, and started making, primarily for opportunistic purposes (Mbembe, 1990), new pronouncements for democracy. In the following, I am discussing problems of developments, prospects for democratization and possibilities for citizenship education in the African context. While my focus is particular to Sub-Saharan Africa, and thematically excludes the Arab North African region of the continent, I am conveniently using the more generic terms "Africa and Africans" to make my points and present my analyses.

Current problems in development

The situation of African development in the last forty years or so is generally highlighted by military coups d'état, failed economic and political programs, environmental degradation and resulting draughts and famines. These are complemented by the post-Cold War fragmentation of a number of countries that are either stateless (Somalia), quasi-stateless (Zaire), in full civil war (Liberia and Sierra Leone) and/or on the brink of self-destruction (Burundi). In addition, the almost fragile political structures in most other zones of the continent continue to be problematic, for what was supposed to be the enlightened and relatively educated second generation of leaders did not live up to the expectations of the African public. It is still the case, therefore, that what has been so practically captured by Bayart's 1993 book, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly,* where public office and public funds were not being stipulated for social development, but for the personal

enrichment of those who were entrusted with the management of these resources is still true. Again, this is an Africa whose share in world trade in manufactured goods fell from 0.4% in early 1960s to 0.2 in late 1980s (Kennedy, 1993), an Africa that spent about US$13 billion on foreign debt servicing in 1995, twice what was spent on health care and education combined in that same year (*The Globe and Mail*, January 11, 1996, p. A10). It is also an Africa where it is 50 percent more expensive to invest than in Asia, for example (Brittain, 1994), and an Africa where in general, living standards are now lower than what they were in the 1970s (Tsie, 1997). In all, so much was Africa's status peripheral to the world community that from early 1990s, new exhortations, some warning about the danger and some, *mirabile dictu*, advocating it, of African recolonisation were being head (Leys, 1996; Pfaff, 1993; Saul, 1993). In the latter regard, Pfaff (1993, pp. 2&6) wrote:

> Much of what Africa needs, to put bluntly, is what one could call a disinterested neo-colonialism. Africans acknowledge the immensity of their crisis and the need to consider hitherto unacceptable remedies.... The democracy movement, which in the past years produced a series of national conferences to end dictatorships, is foundering. Fewer that a third of Sub-Saharan Africa's have anything resembling multiparty politics.

While the weight of the historical amnesia Pfaff harnesses for himself is quite remarkable, his points are, nevertheless, symptomatic of Africa's problems of underdevelopment and overall marginalisation. Needless to add that Pfaff, an American commentator writing in *Foreign Affairs*, should have been aware that Africa's socio-economic and political underachievement were not fundamentally inherent in the overall capacity of Africans, but were, to a large extent, the result of global market and governance systems that were essentially responding to the demands of American institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development generally known as the World Bank. Minimally, these and related institutions, have, via the imposition of Structural Adjustment Programs since early 1980s,

contributed to the development woes of the continent (Tsie, 1997; Eyoh, 1996; Cheru, 1995). But again, the past will not recreate itself and despite the multitude of culprits, Africa must move forward and that requires a number of changes of which fixing the political platform would be among the most important (Museveni, 2000; Sandbrook, 2000; Gyimah-Boadi, 1998; Van de Walle, 1997; Burnell, 1995).

Liberal democracy in Africa: conceptual and applicability issues

Democracy may have, as a concept, more assumed meaning than any other political construct. The early Greeks talked about democracy with the apparent exclusion of women, children and slaves who were not either to rule themselves or rule others. It was only people (free, adult men in the Athenian sense) who were capable of ruling. Overtime, the praxis of democracy has changed with current connotations more inclusive and more pragmatic. This above statement does not, of course, give the early Greeks or other European groups a monopoly on the invention of, at least, democratic practices of governance. For the purpose of this essay, democracy could be defined as a system of government that represents the people and responds to their needs and expectations, and that would essentially be undergirded by a transparent process of public responsibility accountability. With that in mind, it may be actually safe to assume that as long as humanity has formed relationships within the context of social groups, effective and sometimes not so effective forms of inclusive democracy were designed and selectively implemented until some were not willing to adhere to the arrangements, and as a result, discord or even conflict ensued.

In historical Africa, inclusive and consensus-based (with or without minor or important qualifications) mechanisms for community affairs and resources management were, more often than otherwise, in place (Rodney, 1982). Even before the advent of the highly differentiated social and labour order, at least a number of African communities practiced indigenous forms of democracy including what the British Anthropologist I.M. Lewis (1966) has called "pastoral democracy" in

East Africa where under the tree, people discussed political issues and mutually binding agreements were reached with the opinions as well as the arguments of all present officially taken into account. Unfortunately, Lewis' notion pastoral democracy, despite the romantic aura it might exude, would come with a disturbing qualification, for it was fundamentally gender-biased with women generally excluded. As such, this interesting case of East African democracy will not fare that much better than the sexist and enslaving Athenian democracy of classic Greece. Still, diverse forms of African democracy including what Ayittey (1994) calls traditional forms of participatory governance were selectively capable of widely diffusing the decision making power in the pre-colonial African context. It should be understood that regardless of what territorial chances people lived through, a salient feature in the course of human development should be the tendency to create and selectively maintain socio-political environments where different actors negotiate their interests, expectations and even beliefs. The last suggestion actually fits well with a short but pointed statement by the Nigerian philosopher Emmanuel Eze (1997, p. 320) whose sees the *raison d'être* of democracy as "the legitimization and management of the continuously competitive conditions of civilized desires."

In the current analysis of African democratization, which falls in an important watershed of people's lives in the continent, new formulations, with implementations few and greatly scattered, are generally responsive to the basic tenets of Western liberal democracies with less worry about potential problems of applicability as well as long-term development consequences. A potential major discrepancy between established Western liberal democracies and its newly forming African relative is where the primary focus, in terms of rights and responsibilities, would be. While the former will accord this important notion to the individual who, through his or her full autonomy, could maximize his or her life possibilities, the latter cannot and should not escape from the realities of African existence. In traditional Africa, the community's political and socio-economic arrangements have been generally placed ahead of the needs of the individual but with the basic

notion that the two, in effect, complement each other (Nyerere, 1968). And those arrangements have been, not necessarily transformed, but minimally reformed with some urban dwellers in Africa already prioritizing their individual needs vis-à-vis the communal interests.

What should still be taken into account, though, is that with the majority of African peoples still residing in rural areas, and with livelihoods presumably dependent upon family or community-based re-distributive systems, balancing the values (political, economic, etc.) of the collective with those of the democratizing individual will be important. As such, in any new schemes of African development, whether these be political (democratic), educational, economic, technological or otherwise, we may benefit from heeding Alexander Kwapong's (1994) call that new programs of African progress [including democratic development] must be undertaken with a measure of adherence to people's culture and background. Kwapong (1995, p. 152) affirms that "it is the cultural dimension that is the basis for a tangible framework of sustainable, long-term African development." While I fully agree with these observations, one may also see some positive possibilities from Bishop and Hamot's (2001) argument that democracy, in the current post-Cold War world, could be selectively analyzed as a cross-cultural construct. And if Political development (for me, situationally viable democracy) would also mean institutional aptness, then despite any cultural or philosophical implications that might be qualified, what Africa is "dying for", are viable public institutions must respond to the civic, security and development needs of the citizen and the community. Again, my basic understanding of the problem and possible remedies are circling around, not yet going through, "harnessable" projects of political development and accountability that could substantively contribute to the long-term enfranchisement of the African people.

Post-Cold War "Democratisation" in Africa

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Francis Fukuyama's triumphalism not withstanding (Fukuyama, 1993), it was in early 1990s that a number of open political systems were

supposed to take shape in the continent. The importance of getting the political component right could not be underestimated in postcolonial Africa, and as the Kenyan scholar, Ali Mazrui (1991, p. 1450) pointed out, the new processes of democratisation were to represent a second chance for African social and political emancipation:

> If the first liberation was for political independence, this second struggle is for wider human rights. If the first endeavour is for collective self-determination, this second liberation is for individual fulfillment. Africa fought hard for decolonisation; Africa will fight equally hard for democratization in this second challenge.

Mazrui's optimism was to be tempered by the heavily textured and checkered realities of the African political landscape. As I mentioned earlier, the so-called African wave of democratization in early 1990s was characterized by a number of weaknesses. As such, so much was the process tainted that calling the whole project democratic might be a misnomer. And while there have been, as in every experiment, some bright spots such as Botswana, Ghana, lately Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, and to a good extent, Zambia, in almost all the other countries, the cases were characteristically similar to What Farid Zakaria (1997) has aptly called "illiberal democracy". In the new regimes of African "illiberal democracy", the subversive "constitutionalisation" of old structures and loyalties were cemented through the nominal arrangement of elections and other astute but selfish political maneuvers. Julius Ihonvbere's 1996 seminal essay, 'On the Threshold of Another False Start? affirmed for many, the fragile nature, beyond all the rhetoric, of many experiments in African democracy. He, for example, pointed out how "the new democratic wave in Africa has been overtaken by a high degree of pessimism that has risen from the structure, programs and performance of the democracy movement" (pp.125-126). Ihonvbere (1998, p. 131) added:

> What is more baffling about the pro-democracy movements in Africa is that they

> have not articulated a clear program for dealing with the neo-colonial state which suffocated civil society, accentuated primordial antagonisms and violence, squandered scarce resources, destroyed the social fabric of society and promoted unbridled corruption and waste.

The prevailing weaknesses of democratization were also analyzed by Joseph (1998), who reminded us that beyond the cosmetic re-arrangements, what he termed as the long-awaited *abertura* (opening) in African democratic development was overtaken by the continuities of, by-and-large, undemocratic regimes that were actually capable of stunting any new possibilities in the continent's political landscape. As such, Peterson (1998:149-158) states that by the late 1990s, even the few emerging "democracies" in Africa in the early 1990s were potentially lapsing into one party systems and/or into other forms of autocratic misgivings. While engaging these primarily political points in detail may be important, suffice it to say here that at the time of the writing this essay (middle of 2002), African democracy is, for the most part, in tatters and the continent's socio-economic status is, to say the least and relative to other parts of the world, in a very bad shape.

Citizenship education: Succinct theoretical points

The role of education in political development has been recognized by the so-called quintessential philosopher of the West, Plato (see Ozmon and Craver, 1999) who, in his *Republic,* stipulated how the achievement of just society fundamentally rests on extensive political education. Plato's pupil, Aristotle, followed with his remark, in *Politics*, that liberty and equality will be maintained when all persons are effectively guided to partake in the management of government. Since then and undoubtedly before that, societies have created both formal and informal ways of instilling political values, virtues, desires, and objectives. Soltis (1988, p. viii), for example, says that "the conveying, via civic education, of the unique meaning, obligation and virtues of citizenship has been an essential component of education in societies."

As such, and If, as Cogan (1998) proposes, the first element of citizenship is a sense of identity which, in the national space, would include people's rights, obligations, political participation, and relative adherence to societal values and expectations. Emanating from this, the acquisition of what Niemi and Junn (1998) call political knowledge should enable citizens to operate effectively within the system, and be aware of the limits of government, while at the same time attaining equal access to issues and opportunities which would all be indispensable for the maintenance of viable democratic societies. In that case, and in order for nations to be democratic, a minimum of political literacy and political education should be incorporated into the different stages and programs of schooling that are available in all countries and nations that aspire for long-term, inclusive democratic systems. As Michael Oakeshott, in his well-known work, *Political Education* (1951, p. 28) says, "the more thoroughly we understand our political traditions, the more readily its whole resources are available to us." The old adage (undoubtedly with different modifications and interpretations) will still be serviceable here: the more you know about a given phenomenon, the less frightened you will be to engage it.

Moreover, Eamonn Callan, in his excellent book, *Creating Citizens* (1997, p. 125) notes that in order to formalize (or "normalize") the existence of critically informed individuals who contribute to the governance and policy platforms of their countries, one must identify with the whole political tradition and its derivatives so as "to make claim about one's *moral identity*; [and] to commit oneself to continuing a particular story because one thinks it is morally worthy of continuance." The possibility of people seeing themselves as viable stakeholders in a given political enterprise, and positively responding to it both morally and materially must be an important objective of citizenship education. As Crick and Heater (1977) highlighted earlier, the moral, ethical and social objectives and implications of citizenship education would accord citizens the possibility of understanding why "things" are as they are. And by extension, that could facilitate people's voluntary but critical relationship with both public and private institutions that might affect

the conditions of their current and future situations.

Finally in this segment, one should be reminded that citizenship education, as other forms of education, may never be neutral. Greene (1993, 1988) sees the role of citizenship education as a freeing and liberating enterprise, and not as an alienating practice that nourishes the status quo. Greene's perspective in the matter is reflective of a number of educational researchers (see Freire, 1993 [1970], 1985, Giroux, 2001, 2000, 1989; McLaren, 1997, 1995) who see schooling as a potential transformative agent that challenges social inequities, and that leads to a more just and inclusive society. Purpel and Shapiro (1995) agree with observations, and recommend that education should go beyond the dispensation of skill formation and create citizens that respond to the common needs and responsibilities of their communities. The position of these writers, which I am in favor of, could bring about what I prefer to call the "horizontal enfranchisement" of all citizens who could collectively create, in Rawlsian terms (see Rawls, 1971), a comprehensive and pluralistic democratic project that aims for a common societal justice. The above statements, even before they are operationalised, make a powerful case for the important relationship between understanding democracy and sustaining it in the African national and continental spaces. It is my understanding, therefore, that the problems of democratization and development we have seen above would not be overcome without the African public acquiring at least a basic understanding of the positive contributions that open and democratic systems could make to their socio-economic advancements.

Citizenship education in Africa: Teaching people to become democrats

Specifically in the African context, a primary aim of citizenship education would be to formulate and undertake a step-by-step program of positively elevating people's relationship with the political process with, instead of seeing a danger in becoming civically active, opportunities for community progress are highlighted. The preliminary understanding here should be that learning

and understanding democracy and democratic citizenship would enable individuals and communities to fully partake in the design as well as the management of their institutions and public spaces. As Brownhill and Smart (1989, p. 6) state, "if a representative democracy is to work, people must be shown how to understand and use democratic institutions [and] those who are brought up in a democratic culture or deliberately trained in the mechanisms of democracy can fully partake in the mechanics of democracy." Enslin *et al.* (2001) are, therefore, right when they say that in order for people to become democrats [in Africa or elsewhere], they must be taught about democratic principles and practice. In terms of the constant relationship between education and democratic establishments, John Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1926) even if did not zero in on educating for democracy, nevertheless, gave us another interesting perspective on the issue. If, as Dewey emphasized, there is a discernible relationship between general and democracy, then there would be, from all learning possibilities, a potential by-product that positively impacts on any democratic platforms or interactions.

As I have said previously, there weren't that many programs of citizenship education in the postcolonial African context except when it was a regime propaganda in disguise. One exception in this regard would be Julius Nyerere's educational component of the *Ujamaa* programs, especially his well-known perspectives in 'Education for self-reliance' (1968). Nyerere' educational philosophy was a unique program of learning and teaching with clear political platform and objectives. In explicating the type of citizenship that Tanzanian education would lead to, Nyerere (1968, p. 273) wrote:

> This is what our educational system has to encourage. It has to foster the social goals of living and working together for the common good. It has to prepare our young people to play a dynamic and constructive part in the development of a society in which all members share fairly in the good or bad fortune of the group, and in which progress is measured in terms of human well-being, not prestige buildings, cars or

> other such things, whether private or publicly owned. Our education must therefore inculcate a sense of commitment to the total community, and help the pupils to accept the values appropriate to our kind of future, not those appropriate to our colonial past.

Nyerere was definitely aiming for political ends that were not objectively congruent with the post-Cold War democratic regimes that may be taking shape in contemporary Africa. And although many observers may see him as selectively imbued with unworkable Marxist ideology, I would suggest, after having consulted with some of his writings at some length (see Nyerere, 2000, 1974, 1968) that Nyerere's was a unique brand of citizenship for Tanzania and, perhaps, for other parts of Africa. That type of political education could have achieved a special perspective of African democracy where, while decisions are reached via consensus, was not willing to elevate individual rights at the expense of community needs and expectations. Whatever the results might have been, though, Nyerere post-independence "grand plan" for the people of Tanzania did not realize its objectives becoming a victim of the combined forces of world capitalism and the self-actualizing educated Tanzanian with the latter striving to attain, for himself or herself, all that their education would facilitate for personal advancement.

In the new programs of citizenship education in the African context, one must make sure that other forces do not misconstrue the positive aspects of African democracy. One already present danger in this regard is the fact that due to the failure of democracy's economic promise in the continent, there is a sense of dissatisfaction with the whole enterprise. As Burnell (1995) notes, for the overwhelming majority of most Africans since the early 1990s, liberal democracy meant open markets characterized by the survival of the fittest schemes, and as result, the burgeoning populations of Africa's poor are now blaming the hardly understood concept and limited practice of democracy. Van de Walle (1997, p. 15) adds that as economic failures are not good for the prospects of office holders, and there is generally a discernible relationship between political

dispensation and economic performance, new democracies in Africa must either make significant change in people's lives, or prepare to be blamed for the worsening livelihood situation that so many people who supposedly live in democratic Africa, are currently experiencing. The very real danger here is that when democracy fails people's aspirations, and due to the hitherto problematic nature of the new democratic regimes in Africa that has, indeed, been the case, the potential of democracy talking a firm hold in the continent might be compromised. This again elevates the immediate need for new projects of citizenship education that may have the parallel aims of, on the one hand, informing people about the benefits of democracy while at the same time indicating how the failure of national economic and social programs have specific local reasons, and are not necessarily inherent in the fundamental principles of democracy. The point must emphasized again that democracy, however it is Africanized or not, must still adhere to governance by consensus with the attendant components of accountability and transparency in the management as well as the distribution of public affairs and resources uncompromisingly upheld.

In the process of inculcating in people's minds the virtues of viable African democracies, the incremental strengthening of already fledging civil society associations would be strengthened which may, in turn, make sure that the crucial space between the state and markets is effectively mediated. The seeping of democratic values into people's slowly altered mindset could also help check the return, as the case has already been in at least one country already, military dictatorship and adventurism which have been some of Africa's worst scorches in the post-independence era. These changes could also help check current misfortunes of political and ethnic violence, and potentially herald a new beginning that is initially prospectively promising and eventually capable of bringing stability and prosperity to the long-suffering masses of Africa. Again, the achievement of what the African people has been offered so far in terms of democracy is not only not nearly enough for the achievement of a better tomorrow, but worse, is so conceptually and pragmatically misconstrued that while it should minimally awaken us to the urgency of the situation.

What political enfranchisement via ongoing and responsible democratic regimes could achieve for people cannot and should never be underestimated. Of particular importance to this, even if the contexts are both geographically and demographically different, is the recent history of African-Americans who collectively and skillfully used the democratic process, with highly organized and exponentially increasing levels of political participation (at least during some crucial voting periods) (Tate, 1994; Carton, 1984) to move to the mainstream of American public life. With the African public generally marginalized by, among other agents, the schemes of the postcolonial elite, the African-American case could partially serve as an important example of citizenship education-induced political development that selectively but consistently achieves economic and social development for Africa's underdeveloped majority.

Conclusion

In this work, I have attempted to re-introduce some of the development problems that Sub-Saharan Africa is experiencing in this post-Cold War, rapidly globalising world environment. For a while now, African underdevelopment and marginalisation have become so habitual for most people that what Victoria Brittain has called the 'the continent that lost its way' in 1994, has been recently described by the British Prime Minister as 'a sore on world conscience'. What the world, if anything, will do about the case is one thing, but it should be clear to all of us that unless Africans themselves want to tackle their problems by themselves, the livelihood conditions of this continent, even if the descriptive elements of the issues change with the times, may only get worse. One way of dealing with the problems facing the continent is to correct the institutional ineptness that has characterized most, if not all, of the continent's political spaces. One important way to achieve that is to entrench the culture of democracy that has been seeping into the continent's political structures in the 10 years or so. But because the conceptual contours of the democratization process have been skillfully manipulated by the African elite without necessarily implementing its programmes, I have proposed the possible formulation and implementation of citizenship education projects that should

counter-weigh that distance that has been created, even in supposedly democratising Africa, between the people and public institutions. In addition, I have talked about of minimally Africanising democracy so as to lessen some of the potentially alienating components of Western liberal democracy if and when uncompromisingly to the African context. In sum, I fully concur with the notion that people do not become democrats by default and as such, must be taught not only to behave like democrats, but also, and as importantly, to believe in the virtues of, at least, localized democratic national and continental structures. The paper, I have to expect, would stimulate the debate on the issues it engages, and should, especially, entice others to seriously consider of viable citizenship education for the possible recasting of Africa's lamentable livelihood possibilities.

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